



CREATING MEMORIES FOR A LIFETIME

BY TRISHA ENGLER AND DEBORAH COLANGELO,
UNIVERSAL ORLANDO RESORT
AND NIVI NAGIEL, NCSA

In Orlando, Florida, the themed entertainment industry is serious business, and the competition is fierce. Aiming to be recognized as the number one entertainment destination in the world, Universal Orlando Resort knows they have to deliver the best in customer service at every turn, and to constantly work to improve the guest experience. Over the past 25 years, the Universal Orlando team has done just that.

When Universal Parks and Resorts wanted to expand beyond their Hollywood Theme Park in 1990, Orlando—one of the world's top tourist destinations—was the natural choice for a new theme park and resort. Today, Universal Orlando includes two theme parks, four on-site hotels, and CityWalk—a 30-acre entertainment complex replete with nightclubs, restaurants, shops, mini-golf and

a cinema—and welcomes millions of guests every year. In 2015, Universal Orlando will proudly celebrate its 25th anniversary.

Trisha Engler, Senior Director of Guest Services, has been with Universal Orlando since January of 1990, just prior to its opening. With a retail background, Engler was hired straight out of college to work in the merchandise division, and has since moved around to fill positions in other departments, including operations, park services, and special events; and has served in a variety of capacities, including park services manager, special events manager, senior manager of merchandise division, assistant director of operations, and director of entrance operations. She feels fortunate to have been in the right place at the right time for such diverse opportunities, but points out that Universal Orlando is like a "little city," where anyone can have a gamut of job experiences, or stick to one department if they choose.

Continued on following page

Continued from previous page

Deborah Colangelo, Director of the Guest Contact Center, joined Universal Orlando two years ago, with a long background in travel and hospitality, including 25 years working for both cruise and tour operators. Colangelo says her time at Universal Orlando has been “an absolutely amazing experience,” thanks in part to the support she’s received from senior leadership in bringing the services of the contact center to their current high level. The contact center is “usually the first touch point for potential guests,” Colangelo explains, and her talented team is responsible for everything from answering questions to planning and selling vacation packages. Everyone at the contact center has fun, which is easy when what you do is “help people build memories.”

The culture at Universal Orlando, according to Colangelo, is “team-member friendly,” and every employee spends one to two days learning about the company’s mission and values: respect; teamwork; open communication; honesty, trust & integrity; recognition; and fun! Engler explains that these core values developed naturally because of the family atmosphere Universal Orlando has embodied since day one—where every single team member looks out for one another, communicates openly, and shares a commitment to delivering the best experience possible to every guest. And like a family, working at Universal Orlando is not a nine-to-five gig, but a 24/7, 365-days-a-year responsibility. As Engler emphasizes, “It takes such a team to pull off what we do here every day.”

Team member satisfaction is valued as highly as any other corporate concern at Universal Orlando. Employee satisfaction surveys are conducted every year, and leaders are held every bit as accountable for the results of these as they are for guest satisfaction or revenue results, according to Colangelo. As Engler says, it is the leaders’ goal to take care of their team members, knowing that having happy team members is indispensable to providing the excellent guest service Universal Orlando is proud of. To ensure team member satisfaction continues to improve, high level results from the employee satisfaction surveys are shared, and management collaborates with their teams to develop action plans based on the broad scope of information received.



Universal Orlando's emphasis on team member satisfaction pays off with every interaction.

These efforts have clearly paid off. Engler says that “there are so many team members still here that have been here since the opening and the first couple of years,” who she runs into sometimes after years, and they enjoyably reminisce about “back in the day.” Colangelo adds, “You can’t go to a single department and not find somebody that’s been there 20 years,” and is proud to report that their call center turnover rate is lower than average in what is a notoriously high-turnover business.

The philosophy of customer service at Universal Orlando is encapsulated as the “Universal Way,” which includes four guest service expectations:

- 1. Set the Stage**
- 2. Know Your Stuff**
- 3. Wow ‘em Now**
- 4. Be a Hero**

Continued on following page

Continued from previous page



Rising guest satisfaction survey ratings year after year are nice, but all the happy faces are the true reward.

According to Engler, the Universal Way is not a slogan or an initiative; it's a culture—a way of life—the goal of which is to be recognized as delivering the best guest service in the themed entertainment industry. "It's not about what we deliver, but how we deliver it... It's all about creating extraordinary experiences for our guests, and how we're constantly delivering on that promise," says Engler. Colangelo adds that the Universal Way relies on the concept of shared accountability; a "strong service culture where everyone has equal responsibility," regardless of department or role, front or back of house. "Everybody here at Universal Orlando plays a part in delivering that service," says Colangelo.

Training in the Universal Way includes the message that every single team member has the opportunity to be a hero. Every Universal Orlando employee knows the "Popcorn Story": no matter what role you play in the company, if you're in the park and you see a guest

drop their popcorn, you go and get them another one, Colangelo shares. The moral of the story is that it's all those little things that employees do for guests that create that winning overall guest experience. Team members know that "they are empowered to do whatever it takes to correct a situation or enhance the guest experience," according to Engler. If they lack the tools to directly help, they may have to engage with an appropriate member of management, but empowerment is taught and emphasized from day one. In this way, the guest is never left with that most frustrating feeling that a staff member they have approached is not in a position to help.

To track how well these standards of customer service are being met every day, Universal Orlando employs mystery shoppers to regularly evaluate team member performance, and conducts guest satisfaction surveys, both of which provide leadership with consistent feedback on the service being delivered. In addition, several internal recognition programs are in place to encourage and reward team members who go above and beyond. These programs include:

Way to Go, Applause Cards, Bravo Nominations

as well as peer-to-peer recognitions, with rewards ranging from monetary awards to premier parking spots; photos displayed in the main hallway and in the company's biweekly publication; and department recognition, including lunches, movie tickets, gas cards, and even airline tickets.

The biggest payoff to the efforts by Universal Orlando staff to live and embody the Universal Way, according to Engler, is that team members are proud to work there, and proud to bring their families to the park. Guest satisfaction survey results also point to the excellent service provided. Rising overall ratings year after year truly reflect how the teams continuously strive to enhance the guest experience by listening to customers and taking each comment seriously. Though never the goal of providing excellent service, external awards are always a much-appreciated benefit, as well as a testament to how much custom-

Continued on following page

Continued from previous page



ers notice and appreciate what you're doing. Last year, Universal Orlando was presented with the Brass Ring Award by the IAAPA (the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions) for the best training program in parks that have over one million visitors; and Universal Orlando's guest contact center just won the inContact 2014 Mojo Award in the "Voice of the Customer" category. To Colangelo, however, one of the greatest rewards of the job comes from observing at the front gate when she has time in the morning, and watching the guests walk into the park, "watching their faces, watching them all stop to take pictures, watching the smiles and watching their anticipation—that is the best start of the day you can imagine."

Because Orlando is one of the world's top tourist destinations, the intense competition Universal faces is both its biggest challenge, as well as the impetus to never rest in raising the bar when it comes to customer service.

As Universal Orlando kicks off its milestone anniversary, celebrating 25 years of remarkable success in an extraordinarily competitive industry and location, it is abundantly clear that the Universal Way is lived—genuinely and impeccably—by each team member, every day. Engler surely speaks for all Universal Orlando employees when she says, "It's really cool to work here, because we're creating memories. We're creating something that will last a lifetime." When you know something as simple as taking a family picture could turn out to represent the best memories of a person's childhood, it's impossible not to love what you do, which translates directly into exceptional customer service.

Trisha Engler is the Senior Director of Guest Services for Universal Orlando Resort in Orlando, FL.

Deborah Colangelo is the Director of the Guest Contact Center for Universal Orlando Resort in Orlando, FL.

Nivi Nagiel is the NCSA Senior Editor. ■

Universal Orlando employees love what they do, knowing that each little thing contributes to joyful lifelong memories. For some team members, visiting the park as a child is their own favorite memory!